

October 17, 1961

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MEMORANDUM

From: Henry A. Kissinger

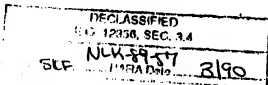
Subject: MILITARY PROGRAM

Newspaper reports speak of the fact that if the present crisis passes, our forces will be reduced by some 140,000 men and levelled off at fourteen divisions. I do not want to get into the question of what the correct force levels may be. However, I have serious doubts about getting our military budget so immediately to specific crisis. If every crisis is answered by a military build up and every relaxation of tensions by a reduction of forces, we will be on a roller coaster, preventing stability both in our military planning and in our diplomacy. During a crisis, we will give a needless impression of bellicosity and panic.

We will create excessive disquiet within the country and among our Allies. We will be under pressure to produce a showdown or else to make unnecessary concessions as a budgetary period ends. During period of temporary calm, the reduction of forces may lead to an illusory euphoria.

The wise course would seem to be to decide on the forces which we can maintain over an indefinite period of time and which are capable of dealing with most foreseeable crises without additional mobilization unless we should be engaged in actual hostilities. I am suggesting that mobilization should follow and not precede a military confrontation. This was the reason why I opposed calling in reserves beyond those we were willing to maintain in our permanent military posture.

I have not had an opportunity to study what forces would be appropriate. However, fourteen divisions seem to me too low. In view of the President's speech to the United Nations and the horror of nuclear warfare it implied, a larger conventional establishment seems to me to be essential. Otherwise, we will run the risk of falling between two stools in our military planning.



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